

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 17037

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR, EAGR

SUBJECT: THOUGHTS ON THE NON-APPEARANCE OF BREZHNEV,
KOSYGIN AND SUSLOV AT KULAKOV BURIAL

REF: (A) MOSCOW 15752, (B) MOSCOW 15366

SUMMARY: THE NON-APPEARANCE OF BREZHNEV, KOSYGIN AND
SUSLOV AT THE JULY 19 BURIAL OF KULAKOV STRIKES US
AS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL HAPPENINGS
WITHIN THE USSR IN RECENT YEARS. THE ABSENCE OF THE
SENIOR LEADERSHIP FROM THE FUNERAL OF ONE OF THEIR
OWN, THE GENERALLY COLD WAY IN WHICH KULAKOV'S
DEATH HAS BEEN COVERED BY SOVIET MEDIA, TAKEN TOGETHER
WITH EARLIER SIGNS OF KULAKOV'S DECLINING POLITICAL
STATUS, SUGGEST THAT AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH
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KULAKOV WAS IN EXTREME DISFAVOR WITH THE TOP PARTY
LEADERS. THIS CABLE OUTLINES THE MAJOR PIECES OF
AVAILABLE EVIDENCE AND SPECULATES AS TO THE POSSIBLE
CHAIN OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE DRAMATICALLY POOR
LEADERSHIP ATTENDANCE AT THE FUNERAL. END SUMMARY.

1. OUR INITIAL ASSUMPTION IS THAT DURING THE 14 YEARS

OF BREZHNEV'S TENURE AS HEAD OF THE CPSU, THE PARTY LEADERSHIP HAS PLACED GREAT EMPHASIS ON OBSERVING COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD PROCEDURES AND PRECEDENTS (LARGELY IN REACTION TO THE "ARBITRARINESS" FOR WHICH KHRUSHCHEV WAS CRITICIZED FOLLOWING HIS OUSTER IN 1964). THE PRECEDENTS OF THE GRECHKO AND KELDYSH FUNERALS DICTATE THAT THE BURIAL OF A PROMINENT MEMBER OF THE ESTABLISHMENT REQUIRES THE PRESENCE OF THE TOP POLITICAL LEADERSHIP. YET THIS DID NOT HAPPEN AT THE BURIAL OF FULL POLITBURO MEMBER AND CENTRAL COMMITTEE SECRETARY KULAKOV JULY 19. SENIOR POLITBURO MEMBERS BREZHNEV, KOSYGIN, SUSLOV, PLUS FULL MOSCOW-BASED POLITBURO MEMBERS GRISHIN AND PEL'SHE AND FOUR OTHER MEMBERS OF THE MOSCOW-BASED LEADERSHIP (DEMICHEV, SOLOMENTSEV, CHERNENKO, AND KAPITONOV) DID NOT ATTEND.

2. SPECIFIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KULAKOV RITES AND THOSE IN APRIL 1976 FOR POLITBURO MEMBER AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE MARSHAL GRECHKO, LAST FULL PDLITBURO MEMBER TO PASS AWAY IN OFFICE, ARE STRIKING TO SAY THE LEAST:

-- CENTRAL NEWSPAPERS WERE FILLED WITH CONDOLENCES UPON GRECHKO'S DEATH, INCLUDING MESSAGES FROM ALL REPUBLIC AND MOST IF NOT ALL REGIONAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS. WE HAVE SEEN ONLY THREE SO FAR FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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KULAKOV;

-- BREZHNEV, KOSYGIN, AND SUSLOV ALL STOOD GUARD AT GRECHKO'S BIER BUT DID NOT APPEAR FOR THIS -- OR ANY OTHER -- ASPECT OF KULAKOV'S FUNERAL;
-- MOST DRAMATICALLY, AND QUICKLY PICKED UP BY MOSCOW'S FOREIGN PRESS CORPS, ALL THREE ALSO ABSENTED THEMSELVES FROM KULAKOV'S RED SQUARE FUNERAL CEREMONIES, WHICH THEY HAD ALL ATTENDED IN GRECHKO'S CASE. KIRILENKO, AS CHAIRMAN OF THE KULAKOV FUNERAL COMMISSION, WAS MOST SENIOR FIGURE TO HONOR KULAKOV, BOTH AT WAKE AND BURIAL;
-- ALL OF THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE MOSCOW-BASED LEADERSHIP (EXCEPT PEL'SHE) WERE ON THE MASOLEUM FOR THE GRECHKO BURIAL.

3. SOME OF THE SLIGHTING OF KULAKOV RELATIVE TO GRECHKO MIGHT CONCEIVABLY BE EXPLAINED BY GRECHKO'S MILITARY EXPERIENCE AND STATURE, WHICH KULAKOV TOTALLY LACKED. BUT KULAKOV'S NOMINAL STANDING IN THE CPSU WAS HIGHER THAN GRECHKO'S: KULAKOV HAD BEEN A FULL POLITBURO MEMBER LONGER, AND WAS, UNLIKE GRECHKO, ALSO A MEMBER OF THE SECRETARIAT. MOREOVER,

KULAKOV DID NOT EVEN RECEIVE THE LEADERSHIP HOMAGE ACCORDED A MONTH AGO TO RETIRED ACADEMY OF SCIENCES PRESIDENT KELDYSH, NEVER A MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO OR SECRETARIAT. BOTH BREZHNEV AND SUSLOV ATTENDED KELDYSH'S FUNERAL (KOSYGIN RETURNED FROM BUCHAREST LATER THAT DAY).

4. FUNERAL ORATIONS SEEMED TO DAMN KULAKOV WITH FAINT PRAISE FOR HIS ACHIEVEMENTS IN AGRICULTURE. THE MOST KIRILENKO COULD MUSTER, FOR EXAMPLE, WERE

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LACONIC REFERENCES TO KULAKOV'S "LARGE CONTRIBUTION" AND TO THE FACT THAT "IN THOSE SUBSTANTIAL, POSITIVE RESULTS IN AGRICULTURE NOTED AT THE JULY 1978 CC PLENUM WAS NOT A LITTLE OF HIS LABOR." ALTHOUGH THE BURIAL CEREMONIES WERE CARRIED LIVE ON SOVIET TELEVISION, THE "VREMYA" EVENING NEWS REPLAY CONDENSED THE AFFAIR TO A MODEST 15-MINUTE FILM REPORT.

5. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT BREZHNEV'S HEALTH DID NOT PERMIT HIM TO FLY TO MOSCOW FROM THE CRIMEA, WHERE EASTERN EUROPEAN SOURCES TELL US HE IS PRESENTLY VACATIONING. ON THE OTHER HAND, BREZHNEV IS APPARENTLY SUFFICIENTLY WELL TO SEE FOREIGN LEADERS,

SINCE HUSAK AND HONNEKER ARE IN USSR, PRESUMABLY TO VISIT BREZHNEV IN CRIMEA. MOREOVER, WE DOUBT THAT BREZHNEV'S ILL HEALTH WOULD EXPLAIN THE ABSENCE OF KOSYGIN, SUSLOV AND THE OTHERS. AS WE
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REVIEW THE BITS AND PIECES OF AVAILABLE EVIDENCE, THE MOST PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THE LOW-LEVEL LEADERSHIP PRESENCE AT KULAKOV'S WAKE AND BURIAL IS POLITICAL. APPARENTLY THE SENIOR PARTY LEADERSHIP WISHED TO SIGNAL IN UNMISTAKABLE TERMS TO THE PARTY APPARATUS THAT THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP HAS DISASSOCIATED ITSELF FROM KULAKOV.

6. WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE, OF COURSE, OVER WHAT MAY HAVE LED TO KULAKOV'S POLITICAL DECLINE, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER DEATH. WE WOULD SUGGEST ONE OR A COMBINATION OF THE FOLLOWING:

-- DISAPPOINTMENTS OVER FOOD SUPPLY AND AGRICULTURAL PERFORMANCE GENERALLY MAY HAVE FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH HIM. POLYANSKIY WAS MADE THE SCAPEGOAT FOR SUBSTANTIAL SHORTFALLS IN 1972 AND 1975. WITH POLYANSKIY NOW AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN, KULAKOV WAS THE MOST EXPOSED LEADERSHIP TARGET FOR COMPLAINTS OVER CONTINUING MEAT SHORTAGES AND LAST YEAR'S DIS-APPOINTING HARVEST.

--KULAKOV MAY HAVE BEEN PRESSING FOR EVEN HIGHER INVESTMENTS IN AGRICULTURE. EMBASSY PICKED UP RUMOR IN MID-MAY (MOSCOW 10944) THAT FARM INVESTMENTS IN NEXT FIVE YEAR PLAN (1981-85) WOULD INCREASE TO ONE-THIRD OF ALL INVESTMENTS. AT JULY PLENUM, HOWEVER, BREZHNEV SAID INSTEAD THAT THEY WOULD NOT FALL BELOW THE CURRENTLY ALREADY SUBSTANTIAL 27 PERCENT OF ALL INVESTMENTS, AND WENT ON TO PROMISE INDUSTRIALISTS THAT THEIR NEEDS COME FIRST AND WILL NOT BE OVERLOOKED. GOSPLAN OFFICIAL THIS WEEK STATED FLATLY THAT 27 PERCENT RATE WOULD REMAIN UNCHANGED IN 11TH PLAN.

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-- KULAKOV MAY HAVE ENDED UP A LOSER NOT ONLY ON THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO THROW MORE MONEY AT THE FARM PROBLEM, BUT ALSO IN THE DEBATE OVER HOW TO STEM THE TREND TOWARD DIMINISHING RETURNS ON INVESTMENTS IN AGRICULTURE. KULAKOV HAS BEEN

CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE POLICY OF GIVING FIRST PRIORITY TO LARGE SPECIALIZED AGRO-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEXES, MAPPED OUT BY THE 25TH PARTY CONGRESS AND THE MAY 28, 1976 CENTRAL COMMITTEE DECREE ON SAME SUBJECT. RECENT LEADERSHIP SPEECHES, HOWEVER, AND CERTAINLY THE JULY PLENUM PROCEEDINGS, REFLECT A SOMEWHAT MORE CAUTIOUS APPROACH TOWARDS LARGE COMPLEXES AND A GREATER APPRECIATION FOR THE AS YET UNREALIZED POTENTIAL OF PRIVATE GARDEN PLOTS. PAST EVIDENCE SUGGESTS KOSYGIN, MAZUROV, AND MASHEROV MAY BE PRIVATE SECTOR BOOSTERS. IN ANY EVENT, THE FORMATION SOMETIME "LAST YEAR" OF THE "AUTHORITATIVE COMMISSION" TO LOOK INTO AGRICULTURE, MENTIONED BY BREZHNEV AT THE JULY PLENUM, MAY HAVE MARKED THE FORMAL BEGINNING OF KULAKOV'S DECLINE. SOVIET CORRESPONDENT VICTOR LOUIS HAS REFERRED IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION TO A JOINT CENTRAL COMMITTEE/ COUNCIL OF MINISTERS "DECISION NO. 843," ALLEGEDLY

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DATED SEPTEMBER 16, 1977, WHICH REPORTEDLY DOWNGRADED
LARGE COMPLEXES AND GAVE THE GREEN LIGHT TO PRIVATE

AGRICULTURE (MOSCOW 3726); THIS MAY PROVIDE A FURTHER CLUE AS TO WHEN AND WHY THE COMMISSION WAS FORMED.

7. WE WOULD VENTURE THE FOLLOWING POSSIBLE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS AS A WORKING HYPOTHESIS TO EXPLAIN WHY SUCH A STRONG POLITICAL SIGNAL WAS DECIDED UPON IN CONNECTION WITH KULAKOV'S BURIAL:

-- SOMETIME LAST YEAR KULAKOV CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT STRONG MEASURES, PERHAPS INCREASED INVESTMENT PLUS MORE EMPHASIS UPON LARGE FARM UNITS, WERE ESSENTIAL TO BRINGING THE AGRICULTURAL SITUATION UNDER CONTROL;
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-- HE MUST HAVE THOUGHT HE HAD SOME POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR HIS INITIATIVE, PERHAPS IN THE PROVINCES AS WELL AS THE CENTER, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE VIRTUALLY NO INFORMATION ON THIS;

-- THE SENIOR PARTY LEADERSHIP RESPONDED TO WHAT THEY PROBABLY PERCEIVED AS A RADICAL PROPOSAL IN CLASSIC BUREAUCRATIC STYLE: AS BREZHNEV INFORMED THE JULY 1978 CC PLENUM, THEY FORMED "AN AUTHORITATIVE COMMISSION" TO STUDY THE MATTER;

-- AS REPORTED IN MOSCOW 15366, BEGINNING IN NOVEMBER 1977 KULAKOV BEGAN TO MOVE FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY FROM BREZHNEV IN APPEARANCES OF THE LEADERSHIP ON LENIN'S TOMB, EVEN THOUGH HE WAS SELECTED TO HEAD THE CPSU DELEGATION TO THE RECENT YUGOSLAV PARTY CONGRESS;

-- AS SUGGESTED IN MOSCOW 15752, THE JULY 1978 CC PLENUM ON AGRICULTURE MADE HIS POSITION AS THE PARTY'S OVERSEER OF AGRICULTURE UNENVIABLE, ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT SPECIFICALLY CRITICIZED;

-- HIS DEATH PRESENTED THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO SIGNAL UNMISTAKABLY THEIR DISASSOCIATION WITH KULAKOV, AND THUS TO DISCOURAGE ANY WITHIN THE PARTY WHO SHARED HIS POLICY VIEWS; BREZHNEV, KOSYGIN AND SUSLOV APPARENTLY OPTED TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY.

8. THERE WERE OTHER NOTEWORTHY ASPECTS OF THE BURIAL. ROMANOV CAME DOWN FROM LENINGRAD
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FOR THE EVENT, BELORUSSIAN REPUBLIC FIRST SECRETARY
MASHEROV WAS ON HAND, BUT UKRAINIAN FIRST SECRETARY
SHCHERBITSKIY WAS ABSENT.

9. THE OUTWARD IMAGE THAT THE LEADERSHIP CAN BE
EXPECTED TO PROJECT IN THE AFTERMATH OF KULAKOV'S
DEATH -- WHEN THE ECONOMY, BY SOVIET ADMISSION, IS
NOT PERFORMING WELL, AND WHEN U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS
ARE STRAINED -- IS THAT EVERYTHING IS NORMAL. WE
DOUBT THIS IS THE CASE, AND WILL BE FOLLOWING
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENTS AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE.
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